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Dentists as specialists

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DENTISTS AS SPECIALISTS.

BY

GEO. L. PARMELE, M. D., D. M. D.,

READ BEFORE THE

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DENTAL SCIENCE,

AT THE

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING,

Boston, Oct. 26, 1881.

Reprinted from New England Journal of Dentistry.

SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

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DENTISTS AS SPECIALISTS.

In the Code of Ethics of nearly every Dental Association in the United States, under the heading, "*The Relative Duties of Dentists and Physicians*," appears this assertion : "Dental Surgery is a specialty in medical science. Physicians and dentists should both bear this in mind." Although the idea, as expressed in this extract from the Code, *ought* to be true, and I sincerely trust the day may not be far distant when it will, I beg leave to declare that in my opinion dentistry as now practiced by the majority of dentists is not a specialty of medicine. Surely a profession or art in which one-eighth of the practitioners are graduates of dental schools, one-eightieth, perhaps, graduates of medicine, and the balance (about three-fourths) possessors of no degree either academic or scientific, has no right to claim equal standing with a profession whose members, with a few exceptions, have a scientific education and graduation. I would not have you think that I place a light estimate upon the rapid growth and improvement of a science so important to the comfort and well-being of mankind, for I agree with you all in thinking that the advancement of dentistry during the past century cannot be equalled by any other department of science. Neither do I desire to place a damper on the energy, industry and effort that has been expended to develop our calling to its present standing, but rather to stimulate still further advance in a new direction. Whoever reads our journals and the transactions of our associations, cannot fail to have noticed that there is a desire on the part of the dental profession to be recognized by

the medical profession as equals, and we also see it stated that we *are* specialists of medicine and ought to be recognized as such.

What now *are* the relations *really* existing between regular medical and dental graduates (leaving out entirely those who have no degrees whatever)? Merely pleasant and kindly feelings—*that is all*. It is useless to deny that they are not yet what they should be, nor will they be until our members are regular graduates of medicine, having followed the same course of training that members of the medical profession and all specialists, with the exception of dentists, pursue. Until that day arrives, dentistry is not a specialty of medicine. I have always believed that dentistry ought never to have been established as a separate profession; but that every person desiring to practice in any department of medicine should be required to follow a regular course of medical education, and, having graduated as a doctor in medicine, to then perfect himself in the desired department. Thus it is that those who practice ophthalmology, otology, gynecology, etc., are educated, and why should not those desiring to be dental and oral surgeons be required to educate themselves in the same way? Dentists are not, and never can be, specialists of medicine and recognized by the medical profession as such until they are educated in the same manner as other specialists. When such rules are complied with there need be no fear but that the medical profession will give us the “right hand of fellowship.”

We again hear it said that a thorough medical education is not requisite to a dentist, and that it is useless to spend the time required to obtain a medical degree, and the additional time necessary to obtain the desired dental training; also that one who is an M. D. is no better qualified for our department than a D. D. S. Allow me, in answer to these points, and as expressing my views, to quote from the address of Dr. J. T. Hodgen of St. Louis, President of the American Medical Association, delivered at the thirty-second annual meeting, in May last, at Richmond, at which time you are aware a new section entitled dentistry was established as one of the sections of that association. In his address, Dr. Hodgen spoke as follows:

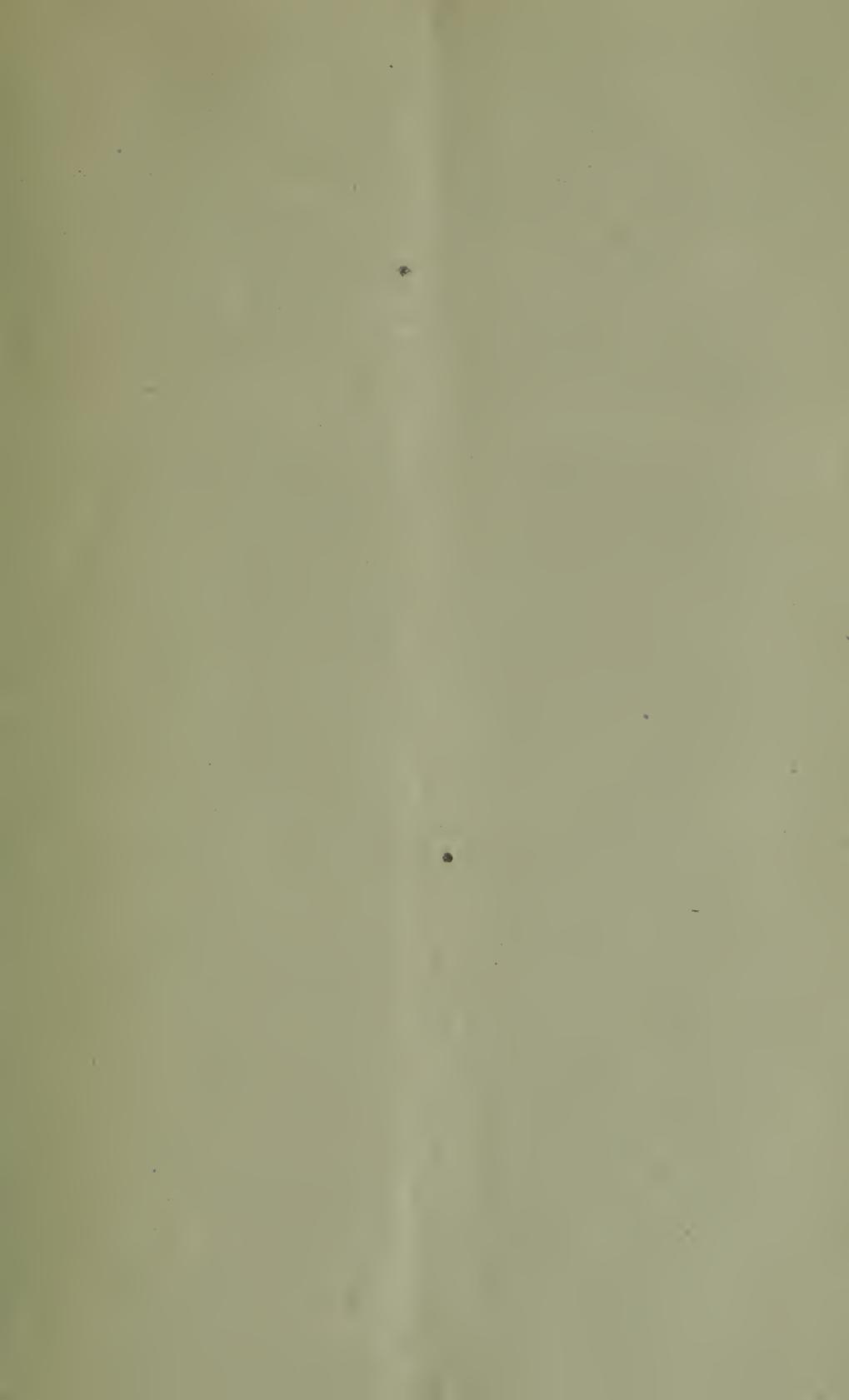
"A simple knowledge, however accurate, of the parts involved does not qualify one to make an intelligent prognosis, to decide upon the advisability of an operation, or treat judiciously even such diseases as consist mainly in pathological changes in the part in question—to say nothing of the many cases in which subjective symptoms are referred to a particular part, when they are in fact but the local expression of some remote or possibly constitutional trouble. Herein lies a danger which threatens the profession through the adoption of exclusive specialties by those not well trained in general medicine. It cannot be denied that the early and exclusive study of the affections of a part tends to narrow the intellectual grasp and cramp the powers of the man who yields to the influences incident to such partial training. In the best sense, a specialist is a physician and something more; in the worst, he is something else and something less than a physician."

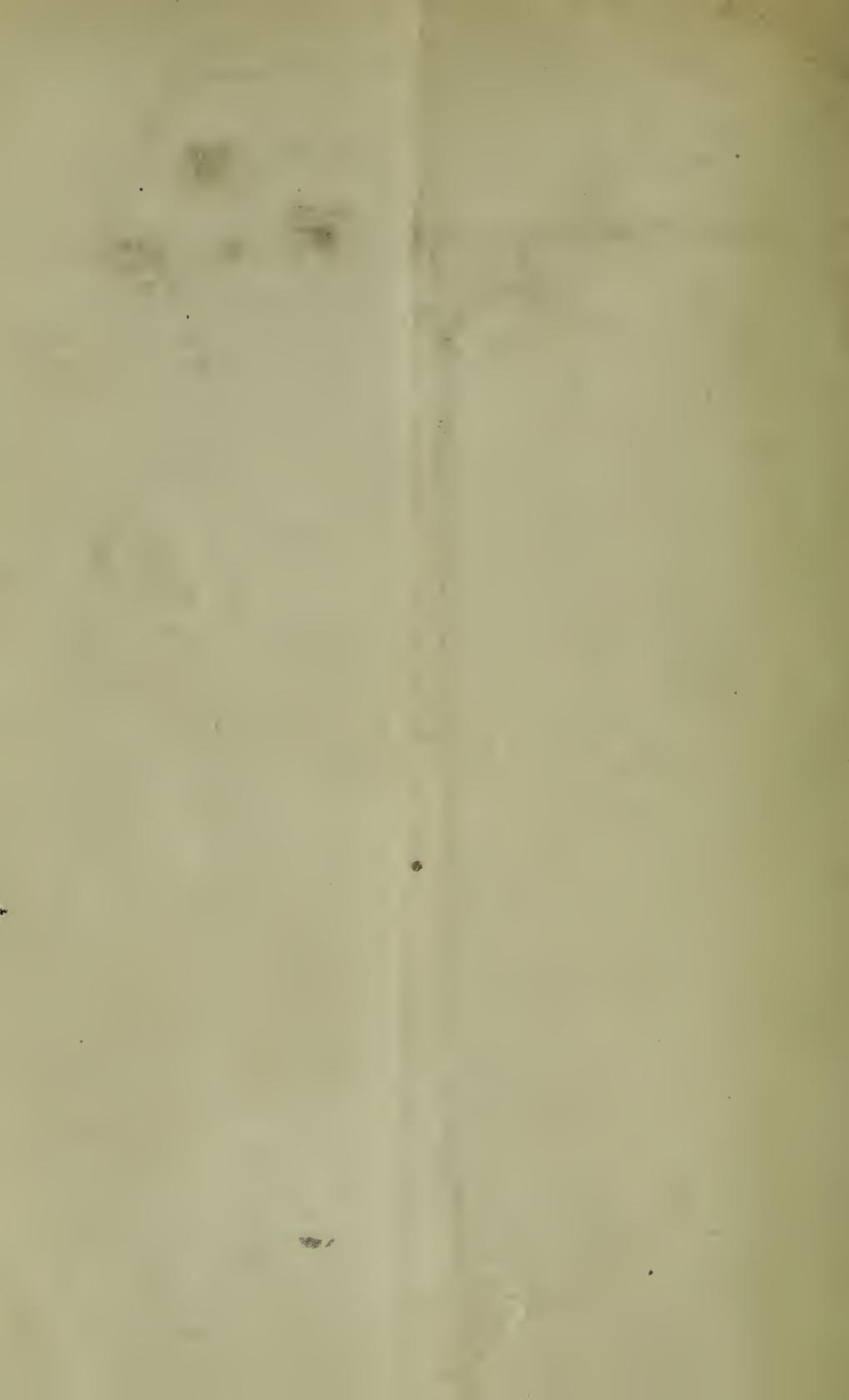
A short time since in England, before the General Council of Medical Education and Registration, the question arose whether a diploma from a college of surgeons was a higher qualification in dentistry, and whether dentists who held medical and surgical qualifications should have them added to their description in the Dental Register. During the discussion, Sir James Paget said* "that proper dentistry was something more than a mechanical art; but an ordinary dentist's qualifications did not imply the possession of much more than a limited amount of knowledge. A man of such a qualification would not know much of such things as the state of the liver, presence of gout, &c., on which the treatment of the teeth might turn. Again, as regarded diseases of the jaws, no doubt a dental education gave much help, but a surgical education gave much more. Any one who devotes himself to the special treatment of one part of the body was less qualified for this than the man who studied the whole frame. Again, it was important to excite members of the dental profession to seek more knowledge than they possessed, for the profession would

*British Medical Journal, May 7, 1881.

rise as this knowledge was acquired. In the journals of dentistry, the papers written by members of the College of Surgeons were of a higher class than others." Dr. McClintock held that special practice was improved by more extended education. Dr. Pyle, Mr. Spence, Dr. Stoyrar and several others expressed similar views with Sir James Paget. It would seem to me, then, that the proper way to place dentistry where it should be, making it a specialty of medicine, would be to abolish its present system of exclusive education, conferring no longer the degrees of D. D. S., or D. M. D., unless they be used as an appendage to the degree of Doctor in Medicine. Let Oral Hospitals be established and Professors of Oral Science be appointed in our Medical Schools. I am well aware that the views expressed in this paper are not entirely new, but as "a continual dropping weareth away the stone," I venture to present them to you so that by continually keeping the subject before the profession an impression may at last be made.

In conclusion, I would earnestly recommend that that portion of our Code of Ethics quoted at the opening of this paper be abolished until such time as it can be used with propriety; and let me urge all among you, who are graduates of medicine, to connect themselves with the medical society of their county, from which they can go as delegates to the American Medical Association, which meets the first Tuesday in June next, at St. Paul, Minnesota. Let those who have not yet obtained the medical degree leave no stone unturned until they have *earned* their diploma in medicine, for by so doing they will not only advance their own interests but will hasten the day when dentistry will be A Specialty of Medical Science.





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